

Daniel Pearson, 2/23 HB6663 written testimony

My name is Daniel Pearson and I am the Executive Director for Educators for Excellence, a teacher-led nonprofit with nearly 1,000 members statewide that seeks to promote student equity and elevate teachers' voices in policy decisions. Today I submit testimony on behalf of our members who are current classroom teachers and educators who are dedicated to their students and profession. Thank you to Governor Lamont for his support of this bill, as well as to our champions, Representative Antonio Felipe and Representative Juan Candalaria.

Proposed bill HB6663 will immensely benefit both teachers and families of English learner students. It will ensure language access and proper communication between home and school, therefore improving equity inside of the classroom. Additionally, this bill will help parents and families to know how to engage with schools and be kept up to date on their student's needs and progress.

All students deserve access to positive experiences for learning and social-emotional development, regardless of language or immigration status, and we need to pass HB6663 in order to achieve this goal. Additionally, with this bill, we will be improving options for when students can transfer to another school or district if they don't have access to the proper supports at their home school or district; and this bill also underscores when there is a clear path for recourse, should either party fail to uphold their responsibilities. However, none of this can be possible without adequate school funding to ensure schools can keep up with these demands and additional staff needed to meet these needs.

Many of the ESSER funds granted to schools during the pandemic have been used to create new positions in our schools to help decrease staffing shortages and increase mental health supports. However, these new positions will have no staying power without long-term funding to support them. Connecticut has a massive racial funding gap with over \$700 million dollars and we need to help address this by expediting the ECS phase in and fully funding education by the time the federal dollars run out.

Connecticut made great strides last year in passing the children's mental health bill during the 2022 legislative session. Our schools have been able to use recent ESSER funds to hire support staff and implement mental health programs that will aid students in processing recent events, while helping them to continue moving forward with their education. Many of our students were already dealing with trauma before the pandemic, and have continued facing these challenges since. Without the proper funding and adequate mental health services as a permanent part of our education system, these issues cannot be addressed.

Equitable school funding is the driving force behind the majority of the pressing issues plaguing our teachers and students, particularly students in our most underfunded districts. With the release of the nations' report card in the Fall, we saw Connecticut reading and math scores lagging behind our neighbors in New Jersey and Massachusetts, with heightened discrepancies

in underserved Connecticut districts. BIPOC students in these districts were lagging even more behind in their scores, and this problem is only going to continue.

Connecticut claims to have the number three public schools in the country, but how does this accurately reflect the experiences of all of our students? Particularly students coming from underfunded schools in high needs districts? Students and educators need adequate support to address these challenges in their classrooms, starting with equitable resources for each student in our state.

Each student in Connecticut deserves an equal opportunity to succeed, and that is why I am submitting this testimony: to demand our state finally addresses the racial funding gap in Connecticut once and for all. If we do not take action now and fully fund education before the federal dollars run out, another generation of students will have to endure the effects of our inequitable school system. We cannot let this happen.

The current ECS phase-in leaves Connecticut schools vulnerable to a fiscal cliff beginning within two years. This means that a generation of students may once again be left behind, and by doing nothing to fix this, we are telling those students that they are not worthy of the state's investment, nor worthy of an equitable education to their peers. We cannot make up for this lost time in the future. This is impacting our students now, and we cannot allow ourselves to fall further behind.

Connecticut schools have continued to face long-standing issues and structural inequities for many years. These issues have all been heightened by the recent COVID pandemic. None of these inequities are new, nor are any of these inequities surprising. The longer we continue to let these challenges exist, the further we are lessening the impact of education on students in Connecticut. The larger the funding gap grows, the more affected are our most vulnerable students. We have waited long enough, we need to stand up now, stand together, and make a change.

We look forward to strengthening this bill with you, and are so happy that this issue has gotten the attention it deserves. We have made great strides in recent years to elevate education throughout Connecticut, and we cannot let this effort go to waste. Our students and our educators are too important. We need equitable school opportunities, and we need to provide care for all students.

Thank you for your time,

Daniel Pearson
Executive Director
Educators For Excellence - Connecticut (E4E-CT)

About E4E

Founded by public school teachers, Educators for Excellence is a growing movement of more than 33,000 educators nationwide, united around a common set of values and principles for improving student learning and elevating the teaching profession. We work together to identify issues that impact our schools, create solutions to these challenges, and advocate for policies and programs that give all students access to a quality education.

For more information, please visit e4e.org.